DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 387 673 CE 070 073

AUTHOR	Wagner, Daniel A.
TITLE	Use It or Lose It? The Problem of Adult Literacy Skill Retention. NCAL Brief.
INSTITUTION	National Center on Adult Literacy, Philadelphia, PA.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	NCAL-BP94-11
PUB DATE	10 Mar 95
NOTE	3p.; For the full report, see ED 371 240.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Basic Skills; Cognitive Development; Educational Policy; *Learning Processes; *Literacy Education; Literature Reviews; *Reading Skills; *Retention (Psychology); *Skill Development

ABSTRACT

Available literature pertaining to the following topics was reviewed: cognitive skill retention across the life span, literacy and basic skills retention, and policy implications of skill retention work. Among the key findings of the review were the following: (1) available evidence suggests that adult literacy skill retention may vary dramatically according to the individaul adult learner, his/her prior knowledge, and the type/duration of instruction; (2) there are few limits on memory or learning capacity, and retention of information increases as understanding of the meaning of information deepens; (3) extensive retraining is often necessary before skilled performance can be achieved after regular practice of the skill in question has ceased; and (4) the increased difficulties in reading acquisition often experienced by adults appear to be social or social-psychological in origin rather than based in cognitive deficits. Policymakers were advised to be aware that the retention of adult literacy skills may be a critical factor in long-term program outcomes (e.g., stable employment). It was concluded that service providers and teachers can benefit from knowing that the relearning process can be more rapid if the original learning experience includes increased guidance and strategies for remembering. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 387 673

BRIEF

Use It or Lose It? The Problem of Adult Literacy Skill Retention

Daniel A. Wagner
National Center on Adult Literacy
University of Pennsylvania

Based on NCAL Technical Report TR94-07
JULY 1994
15 pages, $7.00 (ERIC No. ED 371 240)

BP94-11 **MARCH 10, 1995**

KEY FINDINGS:

- Available evidence suggests that adult literacy skill retention may vary dramatically according to the individual adult learner, his/her prior knowledge, and the type and duration of instruction.
- Retention of information is increased as understanding of the meaning of the information is deepened; there are few limits on memory or learning capacity, according to recent research.
- Extensive retraining is often necessary before skilled performance can be achieved after regular practice of the skill has ceased.
- The increased difficulties in reading acquisition that older adults often experience appear to be social or social-psychological in origin, rather than based in cognitive deficits.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Policymakers need to be aware that the retention of adult literacy skills may be a critical factor in long-term program outcomes, such as stable employment.
- Service providers and teachers can benefit from knowing that the relearning process can be more rapid if the original learning experience includes increased guidance and strategies on how to remember.

INTRODUCTION

In the fields of adult literacy and adult education, most researchers have focused exclusively on the acquisition of skills and abilities. Few empirical studies have assessed American adult learners after they have exited from literacy programs, and there has been very little systematic investigation of skill retention. Thus, it is difficult to know whether the literacy skills learned in America's adult education programs are likely to be retained for very long. Policymakers lack the facts and figures regarding skill retention that they need in order to make informed decisions regarding adult literacy funding, programs, and curriculum development.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a literature review that covers what is known about (a) cognitive skill retention across the lifespan, (b) studies of literacy and basic skills retention, and (c) policy implications of skill retention work.

IMPLICATIONS

Although some researchers have focused on issues related to the retention and loss of workplace and occupational skills, and the subsequent need for retraining, little of this work has been applied within the literacy research field. The present review suggests that there should be more communication between adult literacy researchers and vocational skills researchers. One workplace study provided evidence that individuals in an industrial training and retraining experiment showed quicker relearning when given guidance on how to better remember. Another study found that there was substantially more retention when the trainees were informed of the possible loss of skills following the training session and were given strategies for trying to limit forgetting. The ultimate effectiveness of literacy training could be greatly enhanced by the simple expedient of increased guidance and strategies on how to remember the skills being taught.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FURTHER READING

Bahrick, H. P. (1984). Fifty years of second language attrition: Implications for programmatic research. *Modern Language Journal, 68,* 105-118.

Cormier, S. M., & Hagman, J. D. (Eds.). (1987). *Transfer of learning: Contemporary research and applications.* San Diego, CA: Academic Press, Inc.

Heyns, B. (1987). Schooling and cognitive development: Is there a season for learning? *Child Development, 58,* 1151-1160.

Lambert, R., & Freed, B. (Eds.). (1982). *The loss of language skills.* Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Roy, P., & Kapoor, J. M. (1975). *The retention of literacy.* Delhi: Macmillan of India.

Simmons, J. (1976). Retention of cognitive skills acquired in primary school. *Comparative Education Review, 20,* 79-93.

Wagner, D. A., Spratt, J. E., Klein, G. D., & Ezzaki, A. (1989). The myth of literacy relapse: Literacy retention among Moroccan primary school leavers. *International Journal of Educational Development, 9,* 307-315.

To order hard copy of the full report, please specify report number, title, and price as listed on the front page of this Brief.

Payment: All orders must be prepaid (U.S. Dollars only, please). Make check or money orders **PAYABLE TO "NCAL/UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA."** All sales are final. For further information, call NCAL Dissemination at 215-898-2100, (FAX) 215-898-9804, or (E-mail) **ncal@literacy.upenn.edu**.

Please allow 3 weeks for delivery. For foreign mail and special handling, contact NCAL Dissemination.

Send check and shipping information to:

NATIONAL CENTER ON ADULT LITERACY
Dissemination
3910 Chestnut Street
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104-3111

To acquire an electronic copy of this report free of charge via NCAL's Internet Gopher, point your client at **litserver.literacy.upenn.edu**.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

REPRODUCTION BASIS

☐ This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

☒ This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").